branches of SBI. The fraud relates to Baghbazar branch only.

Foreign Visits by Secretaries of various Ministries/Departments

1002. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH 'SURYA': Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of foreign visits made by the Secretaries (except foreign Secretary) of various Department and Ministries during the last two years;

(b) the amount of money spent on each of these visits;

(c) whether Government propose to undertakes any study of these visits; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) and (b) Relevant information is not centrally available, it is being collected from all the Ministries and Departments. This will be laid on the Table of the House as early as possible.

(c) and (d) Foreign visits of Secretaries to Government are approved only after careful scrutiny and assessment by a Screening Committee of Secretaries, presided over by the Cabinet Secretary. In approving such visits, the Committee takes into account the need and justification therefor, the benefits likely to accrue, the financial implications, etc. Approval of the concerned Minister is also a prerequisite. On return from the foreign visits, the officers are required to submit a report to the Minister and Cabinet Secretary to facilitate an evaluation of the outcome of these visits and their impact. The existing arrangements in this regard are considered to be adequate.

Simplification of Customs and Excise Operations

1003. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the action taken/proposed to be taken by Government to simplify the customs and excise operations to effect single window clearance;

(b) whether any specific guidelines being issued to deal genuine exporter/importer more promptly and more positively then ordinary offenders;

(c) if so, the details thereof, and action taken to train and motivate the field officers towards helping country's export earnings? and

(d) the action taken to strengthen the staff pattern, technical efficiency, system modernisation in the present day context?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M. R. JANARTHANAN): (a) So far as the Customs operations are concerned, Department's interaction with exporters/importers is at the point of import of goods/manufacture of goods and clearance of goods from the country. The import and manufacture take place without payment of duty under various export promotion schemes. The examination of the said goods are required to be made for the purpose of testing the composition of export goods and other conditions of the notifications. To reduce multiple checking, the officers of Central Excise have also been declared as officers of Customs under Section 4 of the Customs Act, 1962 so that they can also perform other functions.

Further, in this regard the following actions have also been taken in respect of Customs Work such as:—

(i) In view of the downturn in exports, field formations have been directed to avoid delay in payment of drawback and carry out periodical review of pendencies.

(ii) Provision of Rule 12(1)(a) of the Duties of Drawback Rules, 1995 further simplified to expedite speedy disposal of Drawback claims by delegating powers to the Commissioners of Customs for

conversion of free goods shipping bills to drawback shipping bills.

(iii) Scope of condonation of delay in filing Brand Rate applications further enlarged.

(iv) EDI System introduced in major Customs Houses for Speedy disposal of drawback claims.

(v) Action initiated to amend Customs Act (Sec. 75A) to provide that interest will be paid if drawback is delayed beyond two months instead of the existing period of 3 months.

So far as the Central Excise operations are concerned, the clearances of exciable goods are made at individual factories/depots and therefore there cannot be any concept of Single Window clearances. However, the Government has been simplifying the procedures in recent years and proposes to simplify further to facilitate the trade, industry and particularly the exporters. Guidelines have been issued from time to time that exporters must be given attention on priority basis. The export clearances should be attended to promptly where the exporter requests for examination and sealing at the place of despatch. For large manufacturer-exporters, provision for self-sealing and self-certification with minimum examination at the port has been introduced this year. A new Warehousing Procedure for export goods have been announced which has reduced the paper work in certain categories of exports and is expected to enhance exports from India. Instructions have also been issued to expeditiously issue the certificate of proof of exports.

(b) No separte guidelines have been issued from Customs Wing. However, instructions have been issued to expeditiously issue the certificate of proof of exports regarding Central Excise Clearances.

(c) and (d) Continuous efforts are made to train and motivate the field officers so as to make them fully conversant with the export procedures. Apart from formal training organised by Regional Training Institutes of the Department and by the National Academy of Customs, Excise and Narcotics which helps in raising technical efficiency, emphasis is laid on assessee friendly attitude of the field officers. Efforts are also being made to computerise the Central Excise operations and develop expertise among the field officers.

There has been a major restructuring in the Customs and Central Excise Department, wherein new Commissionerates and Customs Houses have been created and relocated. For this purpose certain posts of Commissioners/Commissionerates and Customs Houses have been created and relocated. For this purpose certain posts of Commissioners/Chief Commissioners/Directors General has been created. Further, the modernisation of equipment exercise have been undertaken & the Comissionerates/Divisions/Ranges have been provided with Fax Machines, Computers etc., Commissionerates have also been provided with additional vehicles to facilitate meeting the revenue targets.

Currency Chest Branch Rules of State Bank of Indore

1004. SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI:Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 672 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 2nd June, 1998 and state:

(a) what are the rules and responsibility of the currency chest branches of the Bank of Indore;

(b) what action have been taken by the Bank Management against the erring officers/staff in this regard;

(c) whether it is a fact that without sending remittance to RBI for want of space in currency chest branch of the State Bank of Indore, Janakpuri Branch, New Delhi, the cash was accepted in the next week; and